



Eduard Țară: Haiku is universal  
An Interview

**DVR:** You live in Iași, the most important political, economic and cultural centre of the province of Moldavia, for many centuries the crossing point of the most important commercial routes linking Poland, Hungary, Russia and Constantinople. Is it true Iași has almost 100 Orthodox churches? Must be beautiful place to live, isn't it?

**ET:** *Yes, Iași is the town of my birth, my childhood and, until now, the town of my children's childhoods also... In the old days, this town was the capital of the whole of Moldavia, which had borders between the Carpathian Mountains in the West and the Nistru River in the East, the source of the Prut River in the North and the Black Sea in the South. It is a very large area, most part of it is now The Republic of Moldavia and the Ukraine. We can say that, in fact, in the world there are two Romanian countries: Romania and the Moldavia Republic. During the Soviet regime, these two parts were divided and nowadays it is still so. This time, they are separated by the border of the EU. Coincidence? I think not...*

*About the orthodoxy, I must confess that Iași has around 70 churches and monasteries now, a very large number of them in national and international patrimony. Indeed, it is the "richest" city in Romania, from this point of view, which has a such large density of the churches with regard to the number of residents. But I must mention that half of them were built after 1989, when the regime of Ceaușescu failed. My town is beautiful, with many old buildings (here we have the oldest university in the country), with parks and wide streets. And I don't*

want to forget to mention the name of the greatest poet of Romania, Mihai Eminescu (the last greatest Romantic poet of Europe), who wrote +his masterpieces here.

**DVR:** You are a mathematician... I read somewhere that ... “mathematicians can learn whatever they wish and do what they like”, for the difference of the rest of the world. Do you agree?

**ET:** *A mathematician - it's a very elegant way for you to describe me. Thank you very much. I know myself as a simply mathematics teacher (at a secondary school near Iași) who struggles to publish his first papers into scientific journals, recognized by the world scientific community (rated ISI). I discovered, with some disappointment that the most part of the great scientists don't read what you write, that is your results, but the list of your published papers and where they appeared. It is sad for me and for others like me, but this is the truth in this world. If I succeed in publishing my results, maybe then I will turn myself into a mathematician, certified by a PhD diploma (I hope) in the field of Algebra. But, only by name, because my heart is not in it entirely.*

*About your sentence about the mathematicians, I don't know what to say. For example, I don't know if the mathematicians are good husbands and good fathers to their children... The brain of a mathematician is oriented to the abstract world most of the time. Perhaps their imagination gives them the possibility not to live an ordinary life, perhaps they need endlessness to find the answers to the great questions of life, I don't know. But I think that one thing is sure: mathematics alone are not enough to attain a sense for life. Here comes faith, faith in God. As a consequence, yes, the mathematicians can wish and do what they like (with God's help), but the rest of the world can wish and do the same things in another manner (with God's help too, of course)...*

**DVR:** When was your first meeting with haiku poetry? Did you have a friend, a haijin? Was it the first book of haiku poetry you bought?

**ET:** *Until 1990, I had no idea about what haiku meant. Even this word was unknown to me. One day, I remember it was spring, I bought a small journal in Romanian, entitled “Haiku”. It was the first issue*

*of this magazine, now yellowed by time, another “haiku”. That time, in Romania appeared only a book about haiku as theory, written by Mr.Florin Vasiliu, the founder of the Romanian Haiku Society (RHS) and the editor of the “Haiku” journal. This kind of poetry, it seemed to me then, is very easy to compose and I sent my first “haiku poems” to Mr.Vasiliu. It was a failure because his reply was „no”. At the same time, his encouragements made me write regularly. Mr.Vasiliu was my first haiku teacher. I learned the theory from him. He invited me in the RHS as member and we discussed haiku many times in my town, where he had been coming on monthly basis. It was the first haiku circle in Iași, with some local poets such as Mr.George Bădărău and Ms. Amalia Voicu. I remember, for the cultural community of Iași, we organized a special evening in which we read haiku. Mr.Vasiliu told the audience that my poem about the frog (After the frog's jump - /only the splash in the night/ and the moon to shards) is unique about this humble batrachians in the entire Romanian literature. It was a great honour for me and these words made me progress.*

*Mr.Șerban Codrin, a great Romanian poet, helped me to discover what haiku means in examples. I read his first books and I was very impressed. He was my second haiku teacher. I learned to practice from him. He invited me in Slobozia, he published my first renga in his journal. My first results in the world of haiku and tanka were in 2002, when two of my poems were awarded in Japan (a mention at Itoen with the “frog” poem and a 3rd prize at Kusamakura). After that, when I bought a computer and succeeded to connect it at Internet, I discovered the English haiku community, its contests and the ways in which authors from different schools write haiku. The poets which I have read since 2005 were all as my third haiku teacher: the haijins from Croatia, the USA, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Serbia, Australia, Slovenia etc.*

**DVR:**

postman at the door –  
on a letter from abroad  
the first snowflake

Your above haiku was the first winner on the first Kloštar Ivanić haiku contest in 2004. I remember,  
we were so excited about having an international contest, we had our first winner, were you excited, too?

**ET:** *Yes, what wonderful moments! I was in the seventh heaven then. It was my first “first prize”. I remember that this poem was rejected into another contest and, because I believed in it, I sent it to this great haiku contest in Europe with hope, only hope. So, you can imagine my entire joy when I received the prize at home...*

**DVR:** *Since that award in Croatia, you've literally, conquered the world with your master haiku works! No haikin writes haiku in order to collect an award. They come after much study and good work. How many awards have you received by now, it's over one hundred, isn't it? Let me congratulate you on that success!*

**ET:** *You said that no haikin writes haiku in order to collect awards. I must say that, for me, if the contests had not existed, I would never have written haiku, for long time. Since I began to write haiku, I have published no volume. For me, as in old Japan, the contest is the charm of writing, because of the feed-back based on the anonymity when judging the poems. The fact that your poem is judged and selected by poets who don't know that you are the author, is the very way to know that your poem is really good. I love very much the fact that in haiku is discussed the poem, not the author. Collecting haiku awards is the reason for me to write haiku, but only as the steps in learning about others (culture, languages, customs etc.), in learning about myself.*

*Since I discovered that the English is not the only foreign language in which the poets all over the world write haiku, it opened new windows onto the world. And this world of haiku is bigger than we thought. Italy, Brazil, Spain, Germany, Argentina, Lithuania, Senegal, the Netherlands, Belgium, Ireland, Sweden, Portugal, Denmark, Costa Rica, Bulgaria, Mexico, Poland, Cuba, Russia, Philippines, France etc. are countries in which we can find very good haiku in other languages than Japanese or*

*English. It was a revelation and I understood that haiku is really universal not through English, but through the spirit. I began to study by myself some simple things about foreign languages such as grammars and vocabularies. The Internet helped me to approach different cultural spaces. I considered that each of these islands of haiku in the world deserves my attention and my respects. So, as respect sign, I tried to learn some things about their culture, symbols etc. and write haiku as I was one of them. In this manner, I succeeded in obtaining awards on all the continents (excepting Antarctica...) in many languages such as French, Hungarian, German, Dutch, Italian, Portuguese, Polish, Catalan, Breton, Castilian, Russian, Bulgarian, Swedish, Irish, Serbian, Norwegian, Wolof. I explored some haiku unknown spaces (absolutely unknown to the English authors) as Brazilian, Italian, Spanish, Russian, Argentinean, Cuban etc.*

*With regards the number of prizes, I have won, God helped me to obtain (until now, September 2012) 112 haiku awards in 23 countries/ 19 languages and 8 tanka awards in 3 countries/2 languages at international contests. But these numbers are fading by comparison with the great poet Ernest J. Berry from New Zealand, who is the most awarded haiku poet in the world.*

**DVR:** It appears to me haiku is very popular in Romania, Romanian haikins have collected so many wonderful awards throughout the world. You are too, an organizer of an international haiku contest! It's a lovely collection on the Internet, congratulations on that as well!

**ET:** *Yes, haiku seems to be very popular in Romania. We have around 200 poets who write haiku more or less regularly. We have haiku books, we have haiku societies and haiku groups in many cities. We have also good results at international contests, but our haiku movement is divided into pieces. I must say with regret that the haiku is ignored by the officials, is the Cinderella of Romanian literature. There are no funds for the haiku projects, no funds to publish haiku journals or books. All the costs are covered by personal funds. Every author pays to the publishing houses to produce his/her own book in a very small edition.*

*My friends of Romanian Kukai, especially Mr.Corneliu Traian Atanasiu, the founder of the first haiku site in our country in 2005, had the idea of the “Sharpening the Green Pencil Contest”. I accepted to be the secretary of this contest, since I don't know the English language well enough to be a judge. It's hard work because I must move fast with the submissions, to record very carefully every poem and to assure the anonymity of the received works. This year also, I translated some poems into Romanian, to make easier the task of the judging team. Meanwhile, I worked to the contest anthology. It was a very interesting experience and also a tribute to all the judges who read my submissions at the contests I participate at.*

*Working in this wonderful team (with Mr.Atanasiu, Mr.Dan Doman and Mr.Cezar Florin*

*Ciobîcă, well-known haiku poets) my goal was to bring together poets from different spaces of haiku to be together. I invited, for this purpose, haikins from countries which, usually, are not known as practicing haiku. Next year I hope to have more participants and to extend the geographical area of submission, to have haiku written or translated into the mother tongue of every participant. Haiku is not anymore Japanese or English. Haiku is universal and can be written in any language, as we ask our participants.*

**DVR:** Is there a haiku or works of a certain haiku poet you prefer among others?

**ET:** *In Romania we have a great poet, Şerban Codrin, which wrote many haiku, tanka and renga books. I believe he is one of the great haiku poets in the world at this moment. Why does the rest of the world not know him? Because his work was not translated into English. So, to reply to your question shortly, the entire work of Şerban Codrin is my favourite.*

*Of course, over a period of years I discoverd many great haiku poems on the Internet (especially in the lists of the contest results), which have found a place in my mind and my heart. Such a poem I named “one from 10, 000”. A few examples of such pieces of art which I remember now are here:*

*starry night...  
what's left of my life  
is enough*

*(Ron Moss, Shiki Mountly Kukai December 2006, First Place)*

*spring sunshine  
my dead wife's handprints  
on the window pane*

*(David Cobb, The Fourth Ashiya International Haiku Festa, 2005, Takahama Kyoshi Award)*

*plum bolossoms  
I make plans  
for my ashes*

*(Carolyn Hall, The Robert Spiess Memorial Haiku Contest, 2006, First Prize)*

*to return  
or not to return –  
winter twilight*

*(Leszek Szeglowski, Daily Haiga, 2010)*

**DVR:** Haiku goes through his changes, just like everything else in life. Some West European and American haikins like to say South-East Europe has a very specific haiku due to still half-urban living, culture, languages, Nature which is still not damaged as in the modern Western world. If that is true, are we going to lose that special touch for haiku we have, in due time, as our part of the world will surely become more developed and overcrowded?

**ET:** *Some years ago, I read a very good haiku book of a Croatian master, you must know him very well. About this book, entitled “Song of a Nightingale” I have said that the author, Mr. Stjepan Rožić, tells us that “the beauty of Nature in south east of Europe, still untouched by the fever of globalization, is universal. He shows us that nobody can attach labels full of bar codes to the flight of a bird or to the song of a nightingale”.*

*I like haiku because he brings me back into the middle of Nature, even I am in the middle of the city. Haiku also took me into some last spaces, lost times. Perhaps it's the nostalgia of the heavens. Imagine a world as in Orwell's “1984”. It is a possibility to develop our Earth further. It's a nightmare, but a possibility. Until science and technology are put into the service of mankind and not vice versa,*

*haiku can exist. Of course, the world is changing, but the longing for the heavens – does it ever change?*

*There's hope for haiku and for the future, even when the countries go blindly to globalization, to standardization, to a life with a damaged Nature, to life without God. Perhaps the haiku poem will be the oasis for those who still believe in paradise. But those poets will write, surely, about the spring stars too, about the snowfall and summer rains, about the song of a nightingale, as their ancestors listened to it during the nights.*

**DVR:** There are many theories about haiku. What is it? Many forests were cut down in order to publish books on haiku. Yet, it is almost impossible to say what haiku is, about Zen, if we take it for granted that a good haiku does have Zen within him. However, you certainly have your own look at haiku. Can you try to tell us shortly, how do you feel and live haiku?

**ET:** *While some haiku schools sustain a modern haiku, with fewer rules to respect, with my whole heart I love the traditional poem and I try to keep it so in the Romanian haiku area. In my language I wrote only in classical form, respecting the syllables of the verses, kigo, kireji etc. I was delighted to discover that in other places of the world haiku is preserved nowadays into its original form, that I tell it to anyone that haiku without 5-7-5 syllables, kigo or kireji is not haiku at all. In Brazil, haikai was brought by the Japanese emigrants a century ago. Even today there, in the Portuguese language, haikai means what it meant long ago. The same phenomena in Senegal, where exists a haiku contest in French, organized by the Japanese Embassy for 26 years, initiated by Mr.Sono Uchida. The submissions are accepted only if they respect the traditional rules. In the area of haiku written in Romanian, Italian, Dutch, Castilian or Catalan language, the same thing. The roots related to the traditional haiku were not cut. Even in USA, the Yuki Teikei Haiku Society respect the traditional form with success.*

*After so many years of searching and studying, my opinion is that haiku respects tradition only in the areas and countries which have received haiku poetry through the native Japanese's only. In the places where haiku was brought by the travelers to Japan, the poem has lost its roots and turned into a new branch of poetry, a micro poem, a modern haiku. I have read that in English fewer syllables means*



*good for haiku. I am no specialist in language sciences, but I have read many very good haiku even in English, in the form of 5-7-5 syllables. And all written by well-known haiku poets.*

*With regard to Zen and haiku, I must say that it's not necessary to practice meditation as Zen monks do. The same illumination, the same wealth of feelings or the same peace of mind can be received by any of us, the way of praying or meditating does not matter at all. It's a gift of God, not a merit of our own efforts. A well written haiku is a work together with God's assistance. Most of us don't recognize this and it's very sad. The inspiration for "a haiku from 10,000" not should be search in the Zen manner. It comes alone if it comes.*

*To conclude, for me, haiku means both rhythm (form) and aesthetics (without Zen or not), not only rhythm, not only aesthetics. It's like a kimono. You can craft it in every place of the world, even you are not Japanese. Of course, not with Japanese cloth, but crafted after the Japanese pattern. If you cut*

*them the sleeves, or if you ignore the obi (the belt) to modernize it, then you don't have a real kimono. The differences from place to place can be done by aesthetics, but the rhythm, the form remains. The colours, the visual patterns etc. can be adapted to the place of crafting.*

**DVR:** Let me wish you many wonderful haiku moments in the future, to share them with all those who love haiku, and thank you for your patience and time for this interview.

**ET:** *Thank you very much for your kind wishes and words. I must say that I am so grateful to the Croatian haiku poets for the idea of unity. Always, I keep telling my Romanian haiku friends, that the Croatian example must be followed. And I think that haiku is one of the keys of friendship, no matter whether politicians try to break it. The fact that the Croatian, Slovenian, Serbian, Macedonian, Montenegrin haiku poets can be friends through haiku, it's a great achievement for this kind of poetry in our small world.*

*I already mentioned my third haiku teacher are all the haiku poets which I read on the Internet. Among them, Ms.Djurda Vukelić-Rožić is a special one. You, Ms. Rožić have taught me, without telling*

*me a word about this, that the joy of sharing a poem with others is much important than gaining a prize. From you I have learned, without words, what modesty means. A haiku poet without modesty is not a haiku poet. A poet, maybe, but never a haiku poet.*

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